

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

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The Honorable Debbie Wasserman Schultz  
Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Military Construction,  
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies  
HT-2 The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Carter  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Military Construction,  
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Wasserman Schultz and Ranking Member Carter,

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to the health and well-being of our nation's veterans. Our veterans have made great sacrifices to ensure the safety of our nation, and we owe them the same in return.

We know you share our deep concern that the rate at which veterans are dying by suicide remains unacceptably high. As you begin work on the appropriations bill for FY 2022, we ask that you consider the 2021 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report conducted by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, which found that in 2019 (the most recent year of the study), 17.2 veterans died by suicide each day. We are deeply concerned by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on all Americans' mental health, but in particular among our veteran community. Given these circumstances and a deep concern for the mental health of our servicemembers and veterans, we know there is urgent need to provide more support to our nation's veterans.

Last year, the Biden Administration acknowledged this need by including a historic \$542 million in funding for veterans' suicide prevention outreach in the President's budget request, with Congress providing additional funding to reach \$598 million. We understand that in FY23, the three-year PREVENTS program at VA, established by Executive Order 13861 to develop an interagency public health strategy to address veteran suicide, will be coming to an end. The end of PREVENTS is necessary –this program should have been run through the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP) at Veterans Affairs to ensure proper administration and oversight. Now that it has been properly taken over by the VA, the rest of the suicide prevention treatment and outreach programs will be absorbed into OMHSP so there is no duplication of efforts.

While the end of the PREVENTS program will decrease the total funding for the veteran suicide prevention outreach account, we are supportive of effort to increase the overall funds dedicated to veteran mental health treatment and suicide prevention by nearly \$200 million. Providing funding for programs that offer suicide prevention counseling and peer-to-peer outreach services has made a dramatic difference in the lives of many veterans. Significantly increasing support for

such programs is vital to reducing suicides among our service members. Accordingly, we ask that you provide the highest possible level of funding above the President's budget request for veteran suicide prevention outreach programs.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request.

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